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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PANAMA 000791

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN/BRIGHAM

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PM](#) [POL](#) [SPECIALIST](#)

SUBJECT: Rumors, Observers, and Negative Advertising.
Panama Election Countdown #9: 4 weeks to go.

Ref: A. Panama 0715

[B](#). Panama 0651

[C](#). Panama 0613

[D](#). 03 Panama 3294

[E](#). 03 Panama 2451

Summary/Comment: One month out

[1](#). (SBU) With the May 2 elections just one month away, the campaigns and the candidates are entering the home stretch. The Electoral Tribunal and the Ombudsman's office are focused on Election Day logistics and observers. Panama's media and civil society are investigating candidates' backgrounds. Presidential candidates are campaigning hard for votes and pulling out all the stops to find ways to discredit their opponents. Embassy is scanning the horizon for signs of potential problems, but has noted none. End Summary/Comment.

Latin American Ombudsmen to observe elections

[2](#). (SBU) Ombudsmen from Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Puerto Rico, Colombia's Deputy Ombudsman, and the Secretary General of the Latin American Institute of Ombudsmen (Colombian Isaac Hochman) have accepted an invitation from Panama's Ombudsman to observe Panama's May 2 General Elections. Panama's Electoral Tribunal (ET) will finance travel for the guest observers, who will arrive in Panama a few days before the elections. The visiting Ombudsmen will observe polling in areas where the ET and/or Ombudsman's office believe election results could be controversial. Electoral Tribunal (ET) authorities and Panama's Ombudsman advised EmbOffs about the invitation in early March. (See Ref. C.) (NOTE: Six of twenty-nine Embassy election observers will observe polling and vote counting in the areas about which the Electoral Tribunal has expressed concern. END NOTE.)

Press and TI-Panama inform voters

[3](#). (U) NGOs and the press are working hard to brief voters about presidential candidates so they can make informed decisions on May 2. Though each presidential candidate has published his campaign platform (plan de gobierno in Spanish), the average Panamanian cannot or will not read them. Therefore, El Panama America and La Prensa have offered the public service of digesting and printing each candidate's position on key issues. Topics range from tourism, the environment, and the Panama Canal, to fiscal reform, crime and the penitentiary system, sports, and culture. Printed compilations are short and easy to read. Panama's chapter of Transparency International announced on March 29 that it will broadcast background information for all presidential candidates and as many other candidates as possible. TI's Executive Director Angelica Maytin announced that TI will distribute information about candidates through its website and some published media.

Targeting undecided voters

[4](#). (SBU) Candidates are targeting independent voters. Solidarity candidate Guillermo Endara, running second in opinion polls, released another anti-PRD TV advertisement, as did Arnulfista candidate Jose Miguel Aleman. Endara's 15-second spot highlights public scandals that involved PRD leaders like PECC (Ref. D) and CEMIS (Ref. E) and reminds viewers of the PRD ties to Panama's 21-year military regime. The clever ad features a man intended to represent PRD candidate Martin Torrijos making campaign promises while a group of masked men behind him are busily cutting up a cake shaped like Panama. Each has a sign on his chest, including "buoys" and "lighthouses" (references to the PECC scandal). When "Martin" turns around, he has the

word "Zemys" written on his back, pronounced "Cemis" in Spanish, like the CEMIS scandal. At the end of the spot Endara points angrily to the group and says, "don't let them govern. These people [PRD] have never changed and they will never change."

15. (U) Front-runner and PRD-PP Presidential candidate Martin Torrijos has aired a new tactic in Panama City's densely-populated 8-10 electoral circuit. Its almost 200,000 registered voters tend to support the Arnulfistas or Endara, not the PRD. This past weekend, Torrijos and his large, well-organized staff, brought a "medical tour" to the district, offering free veterinary and legal services as well. The PRD has offered free medical services in other areas, but in Circuit 8-10 Torrijos took special care to make sure that everyone had a favorable memory of his visit.

Distracting rumors of secret pacts

16. (U) All four presidential candidates have set aside substantive issues in favor of negative campaigning. Cambio Democratico (CD) presidential candidate Ricardo Martinelli's allegations of secret discussions between Solidarity candidate Guillermo Endara and Arnulfista candidate Jose Miguel Aleman made front-page news on 3/29. On 3/30, Endara and Aleman both denied that they met each other privately. Martinelli explained on 3/31 that the Arnulfistas had invited him and Endara to a closed-door meeting with Aleman, but he declined. Martinelli later denied that he said Aleman and Endara had met, but insisted that Endara and Aleman supporters had.

17. (SBU) Taking aim at Endara, whose consistently anti-Torrijos TV advertising repeatedly alleges a MAMI (Martin-Mireya) mutual non-prosecution Pact, PRD-PP candidate Martin Torrijos quipped that there must be an ENDALE (ENDara/ALEman) Pact. Endara and his running mates all come from the Arnulfista and MOLIRENA parties that support Aleman. In colloquial Spanish, ENDALE means "to give to him," and Torrijos implied that the agreement would commit the winner to split May 2 spoils with his "friends" in the other camp via ministerial and diplomatic appointments. President Moscoso has publicly denied any such pacts.

What's that Attorney General up to?

18. (U) Rumors of a private meeting in the Western Province of Chiriqui between PRD-PP Presidential candidate Martin Torrijos and Attorney General Jose A. Sossa quickly became a political football. Torrijos said on 3/29 it was "a chance social encounter" and denied meeting privately with Sossa. On 3/30, Arnulfista Presidential candidate Jose Miguel Aleman published a full-page letter in print media. The letter expressed his "concern" and asked Sossa to dedicate himself to investigating corruption cases like CEMIS and PECC and disappearances during the military regime "instead of harassing journalists and well-reputed citizens like Roberto Eisenmann (for libel)."

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